

WESTERN LAND & IMPROVEMENT COMPANY, ROWHOUSES
S. Fifth and S. Sixth Streets
Jeannette
Westmoreland County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6091

HABS
PA
65-JEAN,
76-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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ADDENDUM TO:
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(WL&IC Rowhouses)
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WESTERN LAND & IMPROVEMENT COMPANY ROWHOUSES (WL&IC, Rowhouses)

HABS No. PA-6091

- LOCATION:** South Fifth & Sixth streets, Jeannette, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania
- SIGNIFICANCE:** A high concentration of window, tableware, bottle and specialty glass plants distinguished Jeannette as “The Glass City” early in its history. Significant housing stock consists of company-built row and detached double houses, and several privately constructed dwellings.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The brick double and row houses along South Fifth and Sixth streets that make up the Western Land & Improvement Company holdings are a uniquely formal arrangement of urban vernacular housing in Jeannette (see also HABS No. PA-6090, Western Land & Improvement Company Double Houses). Built by the development company responsible for Jeannette’s town plan, the houses extend south of the main artery of Clay Avenue and lie between the two H. Sellers McKee plats of lots that make up the rest of the study area. There were originally 160 brick dwelling units: forty, two-story double houses for a total of eighty units, and four groups of twenty, two-story row houses for an additional eighty dwellings.

Row houses were built along both sides of the 400 blocks of South Fifth and South Sixth streets. The Western Land & Improvement Company put the “brick rows” up as some of the earliest housing in Jeannette beginning in June 1888. It is clear that the double houses and row houses were each separate in the company’s speculative business strategy: the row houses were to remain as rental property while the double houses were to be sold off to individuals singly or in groups.

The row houses remained under the ownership of the Western Land & Improvement Company until local investors bought out the firm in 1906. The first group of twenty units to be sold was the odd-numbered side of South Sixth Street, Nos. 301-39, which brought \$19,000 in May 1912. Through eleven subsequent changes in ownership, this row remains together as a group under one owner. Glassworker John Insley also purchased another row in 1912. McKee Glass Company president A.J. Smith purchased the remaining two rows in November 1916 at a cost of \$21,000.00 each. Smith later transferred these row houses, the even-numbered sides of both South Fifth and Sixth streets to the McKee Realty Company, a business he formed in 1922. As with the other

residential property in the neighborhood owned by McKee Realty, the row houses were transferred to one of the company officers, Ray Sachs, shortly before the Thatcher Glass Manufacturing Company purchased parent McKee Glass. Individuals have since purchased these row houses and those once owned by Insley.

As with the double houses, additions to the row houses reflect ownership patterns. In contrast to the similar yet relatively random series of additions to the double houses, the company control of the row houses meant the additions were much more uniform. Early, varied additions do appear sporadically on the 1900 and 1905 Sanborn maps, but these were replaced by other additions to all of the row houses by 1910. The local owners of the Improvement Company apparently built these additions, which were uniform down each row but varied by street. Row houses along South Fifth Street were each extended with an ell-shaped addition: a room to the rear with an adjacent covered porch. The new room became a kitchen, leaving the back room in the original two-room deep plan for use as a dining room.

Row houses along South Sixth Street apparently had just a covered porch added to the rear. In the early 1910s, the even side of the street, Nos. 400-38, had a small wood-frame addition across the rear with a porch beyond. The addition was a narrow room used as a kitchen, with one end made into a small water closet. Full bathrooms on the second floor were later renovations to the row houses on this side of South Sixth and those on South Fifth Street, while the remaining side of South Sixth Street apparently had no other renovations until after a fire gutted most of the units in 1938. The row was quickly rebuilt with one-story brick additions across the rear and indoor plumbing.

Since this latter row on South Sixth Street has always been owned as a group, the row houses are still uniform in appearance. The row has also been recently renovated for use as publicly assisted housing. Units in the other three rows have been sold to individuals over time and today present more varied facades to the street and alley. Many units have larger rear additions, either incorporating or replacing the first additions built by the Improvement Company. Beginning the late 1940s, most of the owners also added covered front porches in similar ways.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Each row house was originally 16' x 26' and two bays wide by two bays deep, rectangular in plan, and set on a 16' x 100' lot. The houses are brick bearing wall construction on stone foundations. The windowsills and lintels are stone. Corbelled-brick brackets mark the divisions between the units and a corbelled band pattern and pressed-metal cornice are simplified versions of the decorative treatments used on the double houses. All of the row houses have had a similar series of additions but each originally had just two rooms per floor. A front room and a kitchen/dining room, separated from each other by a straight-run stair, comprised the main floor, and there were two bedrooms above on the second floor.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Insurance Maps of Jeannette, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1891, 1895, 1900, 1905, 1910, 1916, 1925, 1950.

City Directories, 1897, 1913, 1923, 1928, 1948, 1960.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1900, 1910 census manuscripts on microfilm.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

In February 1987, the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) and the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) began a multi-year historical and architectural documentation project in southwestern Pennsylvania. Carried out in conjunction with America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), HABS and HAER undertook a comprehensive documentation of Jeannette, documenting industries, housing and cultural institutions.